DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 324 379 UD 027 623

TITLE	Project EXCEL. Statement of Lori S. Orum, Director, and Lucie Barron, Education Specialist, before the President's Task Force on Hispanic Education, Los Angeles. Regional Hearing.
INSTITUTION	National Council of La Raza, Los Angeles, CA. Program Office.
PUB DATE	5 Jun 90
NOTE	19p.
AVAILABLE FROM	National Council of La Raza, Office of Research, Advocacy and Legislation, 810 First Street NE, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20002.
PUB TYPE	Legal/Legislative/Regulatory Materials (090)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Cooperative Programs; *Demonstration Programs; Educational Attainment; *Educational Improvement; Elementary Secondary Education; Hearings; *Hispanic Americans; Parent Education; Program Descriptions; Program Evaluation; *School Community Programs
IDENTIFIERS	*Partnerships; *Project EXCEL

ABSTRACT

Project EXCEL, a community educational leadership demonstration project sponsored by the National Council of La Raza and its over 123 affiliated community-based organizations, is a major educational initiative to improve the educational attainment of Hispanic Americans by working with local communities to develop and demonstrate effective practices. The following models are described: (1) Academia del Pueblo; (2) Project Success; (3) Project Second Chance; (4) Parents as Partners; (5) Teacher Support Network; and (6) Family Reading. Project EXCEL contributes to national educational improvement efforts in the following ways: (1) demonstration of the six models in a total of 35 communities; (2) preparation of curriculum packages and teaching techniques; (3) development of replication packages; (4) production and dissemination of information about project findings, processes, and policies, and research summaries on relevant topics; (5) increased capacity of all demonstration sites to implement, manage, and evaluate educational programs; (6) establishment of school-community partnerships; and (7) increased awareness about educational practices and programs affecting Hispanic youth. Evaluation findings for each model based on student and parent self-reported attitudes and behaviors indicate the success of first-year implementation. Recommendations for related Federal educational initiatives are suggested. (FMW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED324379

Statement of

Lori S. Orum, Director

and

Lucie Barron, Education Specialist

Project EXCEL
National Council of La Raza
Los Angeles Program Office
548 South Spring Street, Suite 802
Los Angeles, California 90013
(213) 489-3428

before the

President's Task Force on Hispanic Education
Los Angeles Regional Hearing

June 5, 1990

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

A Escudero
NCLR

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

UD 027 623

Good morning Mr. Secretary and members of the Task Force. My name is Lori S. Orum. I am the Director of the National Council of La Raza's Los Angeles Program Office and of NCLR's Project EXCEL. With me today is my colleague Lucie Barron, Education Specialist for Project EXCEL and Coordinator of NCLR's California Projects.

We appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today as you gather information on the educational challenges facing Hispanics and seek ways that the federal government can improve education for this population. As you may know, these are goals to which the National Council of La Raza is deeply committed.

The National Council of La Raza and Education

The National Council of La Raza exists to improve life opportunities for Hispanic Americans, and is one of the nation's principal constituency-based Hispanic organizations. NCLR serves as a national umbrella for more than 123 affiliates, community-based organizations serving all Hispanic subgroups in 32 states and the District of Columbia. NCLR is headquartered in Washington, D.C. with program offices in Los Angeles, Phoenix and South Texas. Project EXCEL, the Council's national demonstration project in education, operates from the Los Angeles office.

Education has long been a top priority for NCLR. Given the high proportion of the U.S. Hispanic population which is of

school age, the low educational outcomes, and many barriers to high - quality education which face Hispanics, we have found that improving education is a central concern both nationally, and in the local Hispanic communities in which we work.

Although undereducation is a critical problem in the Hispanic community, there has been scant focus at any level on creating educational policies which address the needs of Hispanic learners and afford them truly equal access to high quality education. Too many school "reform" efforts have assumed that the schools alone could do the job and made no real effort to enlist parent and community participation. Others adopted a "get tough" approach and raised the barriers to school completion without providing students with adequate help to meet those new standards. Few reform proposals have been based on an examination of school policies and practices to determine which may act to perpetuate the status quo. Similarly, few refrom efforts have proposed structural changes to eliminate those practices. In short, there is still much work to be done.

Role of Community-Based Organizations in Improving Education

It is becoming increasingly clear that community-based educational efforts can supplement what schools are able to do for Hispanic children, their parents, and the teachers serving them. Community-based organizations are often uniquely situated to serve as a bridge between parents and schools. Their location in the communities they serve, their bilingual and bicultural staff, the other social services which they often provide, and

their reputations as safe and helpful places in the community make them different kinds of institutions than most public schools. Because of these differences, they can provide complementary programs and services that -- taken together with the services schools can provide -- can move us much closer to real educational solutions.

Community-based education programs can provide both an important supplement to current school offerings, and a proving ground for alternative approaches which can be incorporated into the school programs.

In order to move in this direction, both schools and community organizations need the experience of working together successfully to improve education. If these efforts are to have more national influence than one or two isolated local programs which remain as exceptions to the rule, these joint efforts must be affordable, carefully evaluated, demonstrated in a variety of community settings, and available for replication.

This task force has already heard testimony from NCLR's President Raul Yzaguirre, and board members Superintendent Hernan La Fontaine, Dr. Maria Luisa Garza, Maricopa County Supervisor Ed Pastor, and Dr. Audrey Alvarado concerning the educational challenges faced by Hispanics, and the importance of reforming and improving the educational system. I am not going to repeat that information here, but I want to share with you some information about the work in community-school collaborations

being done by the National Council of La Raza and its affiliated community-based organizations through NCLR's Project EXCEL.

Project EXCEL

In 1984, NCLR launched a major educational initiative designed to improve Hispanic educational attainment by working with local communities to develop and demonstrate effective practices. This initiative is known as Project EXCEL (**Ex**cellence in **C**ommunity **E**ducational **L**eadership). Project EXCEL concentrates on developing and evaluating ways in which community-based organizations and other non-school institutions can supplement public school offerings to increase educational success for Hispanics.

After two years of research on educational needs and promising practices, six replicable community-based models were developed. While demonstration efforts were launched in a few pilot sites in 1986 and 1987, full-scale testing of Project EXCEL models began in 1988. That year, 23 separate model projects were demonstrated at 13 community-based agencies. Currently, in program year 1989-90, 26 local sites are demonstrating a total 46 model projects.

The Project EXCEL models include:

1. The **Academia del Pueblo,** an after-school program designed to reduce early academic failure and grade retention by providing enrichment and educational assistance to children in grades one through six;

2. **Project Success,** an after-school program serving Hispanic youth in junior or senior high schools designed to increase their high school completion and college entrance rates by providing academic enrichment, counseling and career awareness activities;

3. **Project Second Chance**, a dropout recovery program targeting Hispanic out of school youth which provides educational services, counseling and career awareness to assist them in acquiring diplomas or high school equivalency certificates;

4. **Parents as Partners**, a program which provides parents with the educational development skills necessary to help children succeed in school;

5. **Teacher Support Network**, which provides training and assistance to Hispanic teachers and other teachers working with Hispanic children; and

6. **Family Reading**, a literacy development program which confronts the problem of low literacy among Hispanic adults by helping limited-English proficient parents acquire English literacy skills and learn to help their children read.

Project EXCEL models are being demonstrated primarily through Hispanic community-based organizations in 15 states (Arizona, California, Kansas, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Texas, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin. Two school districts (Rochester, New York and Fairfax County, Virginia) and one private college (College of Saint Thomas, St. Paul Minnesota) also serve as demonstration sites so that we can begin to examine the different characteristics of programs operated by communities and more traditional education service providers.

The national effort is largely funded by private corporations and foundations; however, in the last two years, the federal government has provided funding for two aspects of Project EXCEL's work. A grant from the U.S. Department of Education through the Bilingual Education Act's Family English

Literacy Program provides three-year support to help demonstrate the Family Reading model. A grant from the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration has helped support efforts to evaluate Project Success programs which serve Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) eligible youth and their parents.

Project EXCEL is designed to contribute to national education improvement efforts in a variety of ways, including:

1. **Demonstration of six models for serving at-risk children and youth and their parents in a total of at least 35 communities.** One important project goal is to demonstrate these models in a significant number of diverse communities so that some findings may be generalizable to the U.S. Hispanic community. Of course, local projects always have to be tailored to address the specific needs of a given community, but providing a national picture is an important goal. A yearly report on each demonstration site summarizing program activities and progress towards objectives is prepared at the end of each project year. An end-of-the-year report by demonstration model across sites is also prepared.

2. **Preparation of curriculum packages and teaching techniques which can be used in other settings.** Project EXCEL works with a variety of partners to develop innovative curriculum which can provide students with relevant and high-interest means of developing higher order skills. Law-related education materials are developed with the Constitutional Rights Foundation, reading improvement programs have been developed and adapted with assistance from Time Warner, Inc. and the New England Multifunctional Resource Center. Math and science curriculum focusing on problem solving skills has been developed in collaboration with the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The curriculum developed is generally thematic and makes extensive use of cooperative learning. Curriculum packages include lesson plans, teacher guides and training materials, and information on the specific population and setting in which the materials have been successfully used. Project EXCEL is designed to serve as a resource bank for promising, tested approaches and materials.

3. **Development of replication packages so that the Project EXCEL educational models can be used by Hispanic community-based organizations and school systems throughout the country.** Project EXCEL focuses on the development, testing, refinement, documentation and dissemination of educational models suitable for use with various Hispanic target groups. The project has already developed preliminary implementation and curriculum packages to guide the demonstration effort. With the help of each demonstration site, Project EXCEL staff will, at the end of three years revise, and expand these replication packages for use in other communities. The replication packages will include a detailed description of the model project including a description of all components and how they interrelate, an explanation of the target groups and conditions under which the model is most likely to be effective, suggested steps for refining the model to meet local needs and implementing it fully, and recommendations for organization and staffing, training, and linkages between schools and communities.

4. **Production and dissemination of a variety of products, including journal and newsletter articles reporting on project findings and processes, brochures and monographs describing the project, policy papers and research briefs, and summaries of recent research relevant to the models.** Products are prepared in a variety of formats appropriate for differing audiences ranging from the research community and educators to the popular press. Project staff actively seek opportunities to provide public presentations, hold briefings, and deliver testimony on the project.

5. **Increased capacity on the part of all demonstration sites to implement, manage and evaluate education programs.** Project EXCEL provides training and on-site assistance to help community organizations (and other demonstration sites) implement Project EXCEL models, and also to develop their capacity for ongoing involvement in education programs. The program is designed to increase the capacity of local organizations to work effectively with schools and educational institutions on behalf of Hispanic students.

6. **Establishment of community partnerships, including advisory councils composed of local school teachers and administrators, representatives from higher education, public agencies and the private sector, and community members from a variety of professional and technical backgrounds.** Community Advisory Committees which

assist educational programs, monitor educational outcomes including student and school performance, identify problems, and advocate for appropriate policies and programs, are a part of local demonstration projects. Many members of these committees also serve as a tutorial and career awareness resource bank, providing additional role models for students and opportunities for the wider community to become directly involved with students. Information on the formation, structure, and effectiveness of these committees is carefully collected and analyzed.

7. **Increased awareness on the part of educational policy makers, academicians, school administrators, organizations and associations concerned with youth, and public officials about promising educational practices and programs affecting Hispanics.** NCLR's network includes some 120 Hispanic community-based organizations which are NCLR affiliates; other national- and state-level Hispanic organizations and Hispanic-oriented entities with individual or organizational constituencies. Facilitating the sharing of information is a policy network of 3,200 organizations and individuals nationwide and the Education Component's quarterly newsletter which reaches 1,500 individuals and groups. Major reports are advertised to the broader NCLR network of 12,500.

Preliminary Findings from Project EXCEL -- 1988-89

Because Project EXCEL is a demonstration project, it has an extensive evaluation component. All projects follow a standard evaluation design and use the same data collection instruments. Data are reported to Project EXCEL evaluation staff, who utilize a one-group, pre-test/post-test model to examine program progress and effects. In other words, data collected both before and after the program are compared to identify the skills and knowledge gained throughout the program year. Data are also

collected to allow an analysis of the characteristics of institutions which are effective providers of these programs.

The primary data collection instruments are pre- and post-program participant interviews, developed by the Project in collaboration with the Center for the Study of Evaluation at the University of California, Los Angeles. These interviews include demographic information, and questions about parent educational levels, parent and student attitudes about education, educational aspirations, and self-reported data on education-related behaviors. Interview guides are available in English and Spanish, and local staff conduct interviews in whichever language the participant requests.

Information on student academic performance and attendance is also collected from local schools and teachers both before and after the program. An independent measure of writing skills is taken by collecting student and parent writing samples before and after the program. These writing samples are scored using analytic and holistic rubrics developed in cooperation with the UCLA Center for the Study of Evaluation, and the Educational Testing Service (ETS).

The evaluation results which follow are from the 1988-89 program year -- the first year of wide-scale implementation. Given the first-year nature of most of the projects, a substantial number of evaluation findings concerned the process of establishing and implementing a project. Despite the fact that some sites were severely underfunded relative to need, most

agencies made good progress in establishing projects according to plan and achieving their process objectives.

Few outcome findings were expected due to the newness of the projects. However, consistent findings emerged regarding student and parent self-reported attitudes and behaviors which were consistent with project objectives, and have been demonstrated in other research studies to be linked to school success. These findings are summarized below by model project.

1. **Academia del Pueblo**

- The overwhelming majority of students reported attending school more frequently after participating in the Academia;
- Over nine-in-ten students reported that they felt they now did more homework, and 85% said they were doing more studying;
- Both parents and students in these programs reported less television viewing by children over the course of the year and more involvement in free-reading activities; and
- Parents also reported feeling that their children were doing better in school the year that they participated in the Academia.

2. **Project Success**

- Students from some of the highest risk groups (i.e., truants, drug-users, and students over-age for grade level) reported getting into less trouble at school, reducing drug use, and performing better at school. Their teacher's assessments confirmed this trend;
- Many projects reported data which indicated that student educational aspirations were exceedingly high -- surprising for students at-risk and experiencing academic difficulties, and suggesting either a ceiling effect from the questionnaires or unrealistic goals and expectations (or both);
- Student-reported self-esteem was lower than their academic aspirations would suggest, indicating lower

confidence in their ability to actually succeed academically; and

- Programs also appeared to contribute to students' awareness of a variety of careers.

- Strongest effects for all Project Success programs appeared to be in student and parent attitudes and behaviors which have been shown to contribute to school success.

3. **Project Second Chance**

Note: There was one Project Second Chance demonstration during 1988-89. The program was a community-based, accredited alternative high school in Houston, Texas. Participants were 25 Hispanic students, were dropouts in grades 9-12.

- Six students (24%) were seniors during this program year and not only secured a Texas high school diploma, but received scholarships and went on to college;

- An additional 16 students (64%) passed their courses and were promoted on to the next grade level;

- Of these students, four (16%) returned to the public school system with an additional year of achievement under their belts and 12 planned to remain in the program to continue their schooling;

- Only four (16%) students moved or withdrew from school entirely. Thus, this program, working exclusively with youth who had previously dropped out of school and were at high risk for doing so again, had only a 16% dropout rate, compared to rates which are conservatively over 50% for Hispanics in the public school system.

4. **Parents as Partners**

While these programs varied tremendously by site during the first program year, those programs which worked in conjunction with a project which also served the children of the parents in the program had participants who reported:

- That their children were reading more, watching less television, doing more homework, and in general doing better in school;

- A variety of ways in which parents were involved in their children's education, with most parents indicating some sort of involvement.

5. **Family Reading**

- The most promising results came from the holistically-scored writing samples collected from participants which indicated that many parents made gains in their writing ability, even with a few month's participation in the program.

- Most of the parents reported planning to continue in the project over the next year.

- A content analysis conducted on 125 parent writing samples from San Francisco, Santa Monica (CA), Pasadena (CA), Kansas City (MO), Topeka, Milwaukee, Chicago, Lorain, Ohio, and Lansing, Michigan revealed that parents placed a strong emphasis on improving the education of their children. In response to the question: "All children learn important things from the adults that surround them. What are some of the most important things that you want to teach your children?" -- 87% of parents mentioned an appreciation of education as something they wanted to be able to give their children.

6. **Teacher Support Network**

Only one Teacher Support Network was funded and operated as an independent project during the 1988-89 evaluation year. Post-program surveys of the 60 teachers participating in the project revealed that:

- 69.5% felt they had become more effective as teachers.

- Nearly half (47.8%) indicated a better understanding of and higher value for their students' cultural backgrounds; and

- Almost seventy percent (69.5%) of the teachers indicated that they had learned a new skill over the program year -- 56.5% said that they had learned new strategies for teaching math and science; 43.5% said they had learned about cooperative learning; and 34.8% said that TSN workshops helped them improve their students' critical thinking skills;

- Sixty percent (60.8%) reported feeling comfortable putting some of the new ideas into practice in the classroom; and

- Almost fifty-percent (47.8%) said that TSN workshops helped them to motivate their students.

While some local projects have reported difficulties in establishing cooperative relationships with local schools, in most cases the schools have come to view the community-based organizations as important colleagues in reaching children and families that schools often find hard to serve. Many agencies have reported that the schools now call on them for various kinds of education-related assistance, and for help in referring Hispanic and non-English speaking families to appropriate social services. Program coordinators have increasingly been called upon to provide inservice training about the local Hispanic community, and the heritage and culture of its children to the teachers and administrative staff.

Many local projects have worked to develop this relationship by introducing the Latin American custom of celebrating the "Dia del Maestro," (Teachers' Day) into their communities. Materials developed in California by the Association of Mexican American Educators (AMAE) have been very helpful in these efforts. The fact that these teacher appreciation days are launched by Hispanic community-organization has also helped many teachers feel more connected to the communities in which they work.

NCLR plans an additional five years demonstration and evaluation work for Project EXCEL, so information on project outcomes, effective practices, and characteristics of effective demonstration sites in the coming years should be even more

extensive. NCLR plans to share this information at every possible opportunity with educators and education policy makers.

Recommendations

Based on the work and learnings from Project EXCEL to date, NCLR would like to offer the following recommendations to the task force as it formulates its report to the President.

1. **Give additional consideration to community-based organizations as service providers in federally-funded programs.** The Family English Literacy Program in the Bilingual Education Act provides a good model of a program which treats community-based organizations as eligible grantees to work with a population which the schools have had little successful experience in reaching. Any new programs in education, training and skills development, early childhood education, and other education-related social services which the administration may propose to Congress should consider a role for community-based organizations. This role can be developed by making community-based organizations eligible grantees, and/or requiring the primary provider to form a collaboration with one or more such organizations. Programs which are up for reauthorization could profitably be the target of some amendments in this direction as well. The Departments should also resist the temptation to recommend funding cuts in these initiative areas on the rationale that they are non-essential frills. In fact, the participation of these groups is often critical to program effectiveness.

2. **Make sure that existing programs which attempt to involve community-based organizations are actually effective in engaging the participation of these organizations.** Program implementation and funding regulations developed for some federal programs often do not take into consideration the financial realities of non-profit organizations. Advance funding and/or regular payments on grants can be very important as few non-profit agencies have the cash-flow to advance the funds for services. Similarly, while performance-based contracting is attractive to the government from an accountability standpoint, it can prove too financially risky for a community agency. Likewise, some of the extensive reporting routinely required by the government for accountability purposes can create an impossible administrative burden for a local community-

based organization which is typically not top-heavy with administrative staff. Serious efforts to involve community-based organizations should include an examination of program management, funding and accountability tools so that there can be both accountability and feasibility.

3. **Broaden the federal investment in teacher training and re-training efforts to encourage districts to provide additional support and information to teachers of Hispanic children.** Efforts to train bilingual education teachers, while often inadequate to provide trained teachers for all the children who need their services, can be instructive in planning programs for other teachers. Federal programs have made in-roads into providing training and supportive services for teachers who work with limited-English proficient (LEP) children. However, there are thousands of teachers who are not assigned to special programs but who work with Hispanic and/or LEP children. These teachers rarely have the benefit of either specialized training or support networks. Given the demise of neighborhood schools in many communities, and the fact that many teachers are working in neighborhoods in which they neither live nor have strong connections, some focus on helping teachers develop knowledge of and appreciation for the community they serve would seem indicated. Again, local community-based organizations can be good partners in this effort.

4. **Strengthen support for programs which attempt to work with families -- including parents as key participants in the education process.** Through the type of research funded, technical assistance provided through federally-funded training centers and programs, internal funding preferences, and other mechanisms, encourage schools to develop approaches which involve parents as collaborators and partners. Community organizations can be particularly important partners for schools in recruiting and training parents and helping school staff understand how to effectively draw parents in.

5. **Support career-ladder programs which help parents and community members to pursue higher education and secure teaching credentials to work in Hispanic communities.** Many community-based educators and parents would make excellent additions to teaching staffs if they had the opportunity to secure the appropriate credentials. Given the shortage of minority and bilingual teachers, and the likely continued increase of minority and LEP students, these kinds of career ladder programs are

essential. Recruiting teachers from foreign countries may be a short-term, stop-gap strategy, but the real long-term solution lies in developing the ability of the members of our Hispanic communities to become credentialed teachers. Those individuals working in community-based educational programs and parents who volunteer or work as aides in classrooms are a likely group to recruit for this endeavor.

6. **Fund research studies and demonstration projects which look at long-term restructuring of schools with an eye toward ensuring both equal access and improved educational outcomes for Hispanics and other minorities.** A realistic school-reform agenda has to include removing institutional practices which continue to yield low outcomes for Hispanics. While there surely are students and families who are alienated from schools and have given up on education as a means of economic advancement, explanations which merely blame these families for their plight are not real solutions. Federal leadership is needed to provide school districts and teacher training institutions the incentive to engage in critical self-examination of their own practices and policies, and the extent to which they may create or perpetuate problems.

7. **Support and expand efforts to disseminate demonstrably effective materials and approaches.** Federal validation and dissemination efforts can provide an important "seal of approval" for innovative practices with the potential to improve educational outcomes and should be supported.

8. **Provide rigorous civil rights monitoring and enforcement to ensure that school districts meet both the letter and intent of educational civil rights laws. Provide training for those districts which lack the appropriate experience, and use enforcement measures where necessary to ensure compliance.** As the Hispanic community becomes more diverse and continues to grow, many school districts with little prior experience in serving Hispanics now find themselves with growing populations. The federal government should not assume that civil rights training and enforcement activities in the 1960s and 1970s reached all those districts where Hispanic students now attend school. It is clear both from national studies about the increasing incidence of Hispanic segregation and from our work in local communities, that there is still much important work for the federal government to attend to in civil rights training, monitoring and enforcement. In the 1990s, no schools should be allowed to deny Hispanic

children an equal educational opportunity based on their race, ethnicity, national origin or language proficiency either through ignorance or deliberate action.

As Project EXCEL's work continues, other relevant findings and recommendations will likely emerge. Hopefully, the work of the Task Force and the President's efforts to improve education for Hispanics will be an on-going process and we will have the opportunity to share those findings with you as they emerge. Meanwhile, we appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today.

END

U.S. Dept. of Education

Office of Education
Research and
Improvement (OERI)

ERIC

Date Filmed

March 21,1991